



AUTUMN WOODS
By Henry W. Kanger
Courtesy of Parton Mansfield



BRUSH AND PENCIL

VOL. XVI

AUGUST, 1905

No. 2

THE ART OF HENRY W. RANGER

It is not often that one finds a large artistic personality, who, though enjoying the admiration of a group of enlightened connoisseurs, is yet practically unknown, except as a name, to the average person. In the first rank of American painters, there is none, except perhaps Ryder, of whom the artistic public knows so little as it does of Henry W. Ranger. Yet he is unquestionably one of the few great artists America has produced. Juries and societies have never properly recognized his power, and have showered medals and prizes on many who, artistically speaking, are vastly inferior to him. This is in a large measure Mr. Ranger's own fault, if so you could call it, for he has not sent a picture before the jury of a current exhibition in many a day, and he goes light-heartedly on his way *sans* regard, in fact not without contempt, for the honors which most seek eagerly.

Henry W. Ranger was born about fifty years ago, in Syracuse, New York. At about the age of twenty, having already been inoculated with the painting virus by a traveling scene-painter, and after overcoming more than the proverbial amount of family opposition, he came to New York with the determination "to be an artist." The first few years were probably hard enough, for I have heard tales of a studio over a Third Avenue butcher-shop, and various ingenious expedients to hold the grip so tenaciously yet good humoredly taken on the elusive muse.

Gradually, a few dealers noticed some extraordinarily clever and taking water-colors, and in a few years Ranger was on the high road to success. Nearly all his earlier work was in water-color, handled in the Dutch manner, for a journey to Holland had given him a distaste for mere paper-staining, and set him in pursuit of those qualities of depth and richness of



HENRY W. RANGER
From a Photograph



HAWK'S NEST POOL

By Henry W. Ranger

Courtesy of F. R. Chambers

color and textures which later caused him to abandon water-colors for oils, and became the chief aim and achievement of his art. Some of these early water-colors are revelations of skill in the medium, rich in tone, gray, atmospheric in almost endless variations of river scenes, street scenes, meadows, and the sea. Some day I prophesy these earlier efforts, however lightly Mr. Ranger holds them himself, will be eagerly sought at high prices. I am frankly sorry that he has so entirely abandoned the earlier medium, and wish he would occasionally give us a water-color or two. With the weight of greater experience and a more unerring sense of selection, how choice they would be.

Of Ranger's later work it is more difficult to speak justly, it is so diverse in subject, so insistent on certain principles, so definitely a manifestation of his forceful personality. Imagine a man of great physical strength, keen logical faculty, responsive emotions, and an astonishing co-ordination of hand and eye; a man who in a sense challenges life, and demands of it the last drop of sensation it affords; a man of positive opinions, and the power to verify them and carry them through to results; a man full of the hunting-dog instinct. It is evident that such a man must do things rather than philosophize. If a painter, he would be a born experimenter,

and would force his medium to the utmost limit of its expression. He would likely pass successively from one influence to another, drawing from each some power, knowledge, or skill which he would make his own. To the minds of some this may be a reproach. I can say only that they read the history of artistic evolution with another sense than mine. Ranger has searched the past expression of the art of painting, especially of landscape, with the determination of finding and fixing, if possible, the principles of its development, its great traditions. He believes that he has found them, and his work verifies his belief. He is not one of those who patronize nature; he feels that nature is infinitely more stirring than whatever can be accomplished from her inspiration. This does not mean that he is a mere vulgar realist; he keeps to the middle road as near a just mean as possible. His art is based on a profound and sympathetic appreciation of nature. An artistic selection from her various and at times conflicting moods, it is, with all its science, emotional.

Any one seeing together half a dozen different pictures by Mr. Ranger, whatever the subjects or their color schemes, would immediately feel the presence of a single dominating idea. This dominating central idea is the mastery of "tone." Definition is a difficult matter; perhaps the



GOLDEN EVENING—NOANK

By Henry W. Ranger

Courtesy of Dr. A. C. Humphreys

meaning of tone may be better suggested than defined. Let two violinists take one after the other the same violin, the same bow, and play the same piece, say the opening bars of the Bach "Chaconne"; they play with equal fluency. One will leave you cold and uninterested, the other will electrify you; the difference between the mere objective thing and a voice pregnant with human sympathy and significance. One has, the other has not, "tone." The difference between a piece of Chinese porcelain and a common ginger-jar—this is what Mr. Ranger, I take it, means by tone. In painting, a close and sympathetic adjustment of the hues and values of a picture to its dominating key—which is the index of its emotional meaning—an interdependence of parts that insures rich and glowing harmony. This tonal quality is certainly one of the great characteristics of the old masters, a something inherent in them, not due to time, or an oilskin, or copious varnishings. Joined as it is in Mr. Ranger's work with a strong sense of structure and rhythmical composition, we can truly say that he works as completely as possible in the best traditions of oil-painting.

For several years past Mr. Ranger has made an annual exhibition of a dozen or fifteen pictures. They have invariably been rich, brilliant, and commanding, but they have not given an adequate idea of the scope and power of his art. I hope that he will soon see fit to make a large, and for



BOW BRIDGE
By Henry W. Ranger



ON MASON'S ISLAND

By Henry W. Ranger

lack of a better term a retrospective exhibition, an exhibition covering the last fifteen years' work. Its range would be astonishing; inspirations drawn from multitudinous places and phases,—from the humble yet heroic life of the fisher-folk of Laren, to the prosperous ship-builders of Noank; forest scenes, park scenes, rivers, as the Thames, the Dort, the Hudson, and New York harbor; navy-yards and arsenals, sand-dunes of Holland, and the rocky coast of Connecticut; landscapes of all kinds, classic and romantic and intimate. To mention them all makes one vie with Polonius's description of the players. And through them all runs the same strong personal expression.

Ranger has been an arch-assimilator, has mined his ore wherever he found gold, with a fine indifference for the fact that others may have preceded him in the field, and only now is he crystallizing into his ultimate self. People used to say he imitated Corot, Diaz, Dupré, etc., *ad nauseam*. Indeed, I have heard people say of the same canvas that "it was like all of the men of 1830," even dragging in by way of variety Maris and Weissenbruch.—which only goes to show how much can be seen with eyes that are looking but for one thing, and shutting all other qualities from their vision; as if such a man could rest in imitation; he is born

himself, and must move on to his inevitable climax. But because he is a militant figure, not afraid of having cohorts of enemies, the full meed of praise has not been given to him yet. It may never be given to him, for we all have our serious faults and limitations. These our contemporaries can see with great clearness, while their sight of our better qualities may be dim, so that our mutual criticism is rarely what criticism should be: intelligent appreciation.



BRADLEY'S MILL-POND
By Henry W. Ranger
Courtesy of J. H. Rhoades

I shall not attempt prophecy of what development is to come. Ranger is still young in years, though old in craft. He has already made himself one of the great artistic figures. The last few years have shown an advance in his work that is astonishing. If it may be considered an index of his future progress, may we not safely say that when his work is done the world will be the richer by a landscapist of the first order? His canvases to-day are to be found in many of the finest collections in the country, and it is certain that the growing appreciation of his

work will result in a sharp demand for his pictures. Hence we have a reasonable assurance, not merely that the artist will take and hold the position his genius merits, but that his works will inevitably gravitate into important galleries. In speaking thus enthusiastically of Ranger, I have sought not to let personal friendship bias, as it so often does, candid critical judgment. I believe fully that he is one of the commanding figures, one of the pictorial geniuses this country has produced. His habits of industry and his indifference to the praise or censure of the public are the safeguard and assurance of his future development.

PAUL DOUGHERTY.

NOTE.—For other examples of Ranger's work, see following pages.

ART EDUCATION AT HOME AND ABROAD

I am not of those who believe that America as yet offers all the conditions requisite for the best training of a professional artist. We are too young a nation; our civilization in many respects is yet too crude. We are improving rapidly, as I note on the occasion of each visit; yet it seems to me that to advise art students against going abroad at all, as I have sometimes heard done, is ill timed. There is, necessarily, an art atmosphere in European cities which is still absent here. In order that the young artist may get his eyes opened he needs at least a brief period of study abroad.

At the same time, from what I have seen of the work of the students in Paris and other European cities, I believe that every American student, unless very exceptionally situated, would best remain here while acquiring the elements of his profession. We have an art that is buoyant and positive. Some of the best painters and sculptors in the world are Americans, and many of the strongest of these are instructors in our country. A student in Boston, for example, learns to draw and paint in the classes of men like Edmund C. Tarbell, Frank W. Benson, Philip Hale, painters, or Bela Pratt, sculptor, to as good advantage as anywhere in the world. In European cities, and particularly in Paris, there are difficulties



SENTINEL ROCK
By Henry W. Ranger
Courtesy of Dr. A. C. Humphreys

which work very seriously against the beginner. For one thing, young people from the United States do not come into close relationship with the masters under whom they study. The distinguished French artist makes his hurried rounds once or twice a week, glances at the work, says very rapidly, "It is good," or "It is bad," and passes on to the next. In Ameri-



SPRING WOODS

By Henry W. Ranger

Courtesy of J. H. Rhoades

can art school classes, as I have observed them, the instructors take a personal interest in what their pupils are doing, and in many cases become personally acquainted with them.

There is, furthermore, in such a school as the one at the museum in Boston — and I presume in other American art schools, with whose work I am not so well acquainted — a very desirable harmony in the quality of the teacher. The artists here sympathize with each other's point of view, and each endeavors to prepare his pupils for the work of the other, so that there is little or none of that learning under one master and unlearning under another, which is so fatal to progress.

Particularly for women students, American cities such as Boston, New York, or Chicago offer distinct advantages. They know under whom they



NOANK SHIPYARD
By Henry W. Ranger



are going to study, and what the work will be like, while in a foreign city, ignorant of the language, they resort generally to those ateliers in which a majority of students are already Americans. The social conditions there are unfavorable, the American girl discovering that many things which she has always been accustomed to do subject her to annoyance in Paris. She finds herself more or less narrowed down to a small circle of acquaintances of her own nationality; she may not come into contact with the men who are destined to be great, unless these men are also Americans. In every way she would be better situated for learning the elements of her profession in her own country.

Of course, after the student, man or woman, has become thoroughly well trained in drawing and painting, and it is nearly time to strike out independently, then he should unquestionably spend as much time as he can afford abroad. Art knows no country. Wherever it is found to be at its best, there the young artist should live for a time. In particular, the opportunities to study the art of other periods are greater in Europe than in America.

One thing which I wish might be brought about is a better public appreciation in this country of the work of young American artists recently returned from abroad. The promising painter or sculptor from whom accomplishment may fairly be expected is one who has obtained a traveling scholarship, such as the Paige scholarship, of the museum school in Boston, or the Rhinehart scholarship in sculpture from Baltimore. Not many mistakes are made in the choice of the holders of these prizes. As a rule, they are taken by young men or young women of marked capacity for succeeding in the fine arts. These scholars go abroad, spend two or three years in advanced study, living upon an income which, though sufficient for their needs, does not permit saving anything. Once the young artist has reached the end of his term, he returns to the United States without further support.

Here he finds that, despite his undoubted skill, it is often exceedingly difficult to be recognized; not infrequently he is obliged to lower his ideals in order to furnish the means of support. Some there are who will get out of the rut; yet the artistic temperament is such that once habituated to do mere hackwork, it is often spoiled for anything better. It would therefore be very desirable were the public disposed to accept the findings of competent juries of artists, and to regard the young prize-winners as men or women who deserve to be encouraged at the outset of their career in order that there may be fewer cases of failure among artists of promise. Even from a commercial standpoint, it is certainly true that investment in the works of young painters of talent has frequently proved to be exceedingly profitable.

WALTER GAY.